Name all of the Roman Emperors that forbade Christians and other religious groups to assemble for religious purposes between 70 A.D. and 313 A.D.

Based on my comprehensive research of Roman imperial edicts and persecution policies from 70-313 AD, I can now provide a detailed answer about which emperors specifically forbade Christian and other religious assemblies.

Roman Emperors Who Forbade Christian Assembly (70-313 AD)

The historical record reveals that only a limited number of Roman emperors issued explicit edicts forbidding Christians from assembling for religious purposes during this period. While many emperors persecuted Christians through various means, formal prohibitions on assembly were less common than other forms of persecution.

Emperors Who Explicitly Banned Christian Assembly

Valerian (253-260 AD)

Valerian issued two major anti-Christian edicts. In August 257 AD, his first edict specifically forbade Christians from holding assemblies and prohibited them from entering Christian cemeteries. This edict was directed primarily at the clergy—bishops, priests, and deacons—who were ordered to offer sacrifice under pain of exile. The following year in August 258 AD, Valerian issued a second, more severe edict that imposed the death penalty on clergy who refused to sacrifice and confiscated the property of Christian laypeople.[1] [2] [3] [4]

Diocletian (284-305 AD)

Diocletian initiated the most systematic and severe persecution of Christians in Roman history. On February 23 (or 24), 303 AD, he issued his first "Edict against the Christians," which explicitly prohibited Christians from assembling for worship. This edict also ordered the destruction of churches, the burning of Christian scriptures, and the confiscation of Christian property. Throughout 303 and 304 AD, Diocletian issued three additional edicts of increasing severity, including one in 304 AD that ordered all persons—men, women, and children—to gather in public spaces and offer collective sacrifices to the Roman gods, with execution as the penalty for refusal.[5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10] [11]

Licinius (308-324 AD)

After initially supporting the Edict of Milan in 313 AD alongside Constantine, Licinius reversed course around 316-320 AD. He enacted various laws against Christians, including forbidding bishops to communicate with each other, banning assemblies of bishops, forbidding men and women to worship together, and decreeing that Christian assemblies must meet outside city walls rather than within cities. By 320 AD, Licinius had issued edicts restricting Christian practices in the East.[12] [13] [14] [15] [16]

Emperors Whose Persecution Did Not Include Explicit Assembly Bans

While the following emperors persecuted Christians, the historical evidence does not clearly indicate they issued specific edicts forbidding assembly:

Nero (54-68 AD) blamed Christians for the Great Fire of Rome in 64 AD and executed many, but there is no evidence he issued an edict specifically prohibiting Christian assembly.[17] [18] [19]

Domitian (81-96 AD) is traditionally listed among persecutors, but modern scholarship questions whether he conducted systematic persecution of Christians. The evidence suggests only limited actions such as banishment of certain individuals rather than empire-wide edicts.[20] [21] [22] [23] [24]

Trajan (98-117 AD) established an important policy through his correspondence with Pliny the Younger around 112 AD, but he did not forbid Christian assembly. Rather, he instructed that Christians should not be sought out but should be punished if accused and convicted. This policy treated Christianity as illegal without actively suppressing assemblies.[25] [26] [27] [28]

Septimius Severus (193-211 AD) issued an edict in 202 AD forbidding conversion to Christianity or Judaism, but this did not explicitly ban Christian assemblies.[29] [30] [31] [32]

Maximinus Thrax (235-238 AD) ordered that church leaders be put to death but did not issue a general prohibition on assembly.[33] [34] [35]

Decius (249-251 AD) initiated the first empire-wide persecution in 250 AD, requiring all inhabitants to sacrifice to the Roman gods. While this was devastating to Christians, it was not specifically an assembly ban but rather a universal sacrifice requirement.[7] [36] [25]

Marcus Aurelius (161-180 AD) presided over persecutions such as the martyrdoms at Lyon in 177 AD, but modern scholarship suggests these were local affairs rather than resulting from imperial edicts forbidding assembly.[37] [38] [39]

Summary

Only **three emperors** can be definitively identified as having issued edicts specifically forbidding Christians (and by extension, potentially other religious groups) from assembling for religious purposes between 70 and 313 AD:

1. **Valerian** (257 AD)
2. **Diocletian** (303 AD)
3. **Licinius** (316-320 AD)

It is important to note that persecution of Christians took many forms beyond assembly prohibitions, including requirements to sacrifice to pagan gods, confiscation of property, execution of clergy and laity, destruction of churches and scriptures, and removal from public office. Many emperors persecuted Christians severely without issuing specific bans on assembly, while the formal prohibition of Christian gatherings represented a particularly targeted form of suppression employed by only these three rulers.

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